

“In All the Right Places”
September 27, 2026

Isaiah 58:6-12

Can you remember the first time in your life when God disappointed you? Maybe you were a child and you prayed for a particular birthday present or a specific gift under the Christmas tree. But you never received it. Or you asked God to give you a friend to play with at recess, but the other kids in your class chose not to include you.

Maybe you can remember God not coming through for you when you were a teenager. The time you asked God to help you score well on a particular test. You thought you studied and yet when the teacher handed your exam back to you, the grade wasn't anywhere close to what you anticipated. Or you begged God to help you get a spot on the team at the end of the tryouts. But when the final roster was posted, you were one of the last players cut. Or you had your heart set on a particular part in the school play, but one of your classmates was chosen for the role you coveted.

As an adult, can you recall praying for a relationship to succeed...only to realize over time that it was doomed to fail? Can you point to a time when you asked God to help someone you love heal and grow stronger...only to watch their health deteriorate? Have you been frustrated by all the violence and the injustice in the world, wondering what God is up to and why God isn't doing something to make the world kinder and gentler?

I suspect God has found a way to disillusion many of us...maybe all of us. Leading us to question why God isn't paying attention or isn't taking us seriously enough. Meanwhile, it doesn't usually occur to us that the actual problem may be the reverse. You and I are so busy making noise and demanding answers and actions from God that we're the ones not giving God enough time or space to respond.

Part of the problem, I think, is that we might not be looking for God in the right places. We're convinced we can find God if we pray more and read the Bible more and spend more time meditating and reflecting. Maybe if we hang out with people who seem to be in tune and in touch with God then God will somehow rub off on us. Or perhaps we just have to go to church more often because God must be showing up in those buildings somewhere.

There is some truth to all of that, I believe. I'd like to think God is a regular visitor here in this church, stopping by to catch a taste of worship on a Sunday morning...listening to the choir, hearing the prayers, double checking the sermon. I hope God pops in to get a glimpse of what our children are learning in their church school classes. Or ducks a head in later to see what the youth groups might be up to on Sunday afternoons.

But make no mistake. God is busy. I mean really busy. And God doesn't keep the same schedule and have the same agenda you and I have. It's not that God doesn't appreciate all our efforts to keep in touch with God. I'm sure God has a soft spot for all the prayers and the devotions and the Bible readings. But while you and I are sitting here in this sanctuary waiting for God to make a prolonged appearance, I'm pretty sure God is in and out.

Mostly out, in fact. Out there in the world. Over the course of the next month, I imagine God is going to be standing in lines at soup kitchens and food pantries when people's SNAP benefits get cut and there's not enough money for individuals and families to put food on the tables. God is going to be in the crowded emergency rooms at nearby hospitals, helping take care of all the people who are being kicked off their health insurance plans even though they need the medical care of a nurse or a doctor.

God isn't planning to walk away and abandon you and me. But I have to believe God is spending a significant amount of time these days with the people in this country who are worried about being picked up by ICE agents and sent to holding prisons or deported back to unsafe countries. No doubt God listens to the prayers of all God's people. Still, right about now, God is listening extra hard to the fearful prayers of our Jewish brothers and sisters facing rising antisemitism across our nation. And God is listening extra carefully to the sorrowful prayers of Palestinian mothers and fathers who have witnessed twenty thousand of their children killed in the current war in Gaza.

In today's Scripture lesson, God doesn't even come up with a pretense to justify where God is and what God is doing. God simply speaks through the Prophet Isaiah and makes it clear. "Is this not the fast I choose?" God proclaims. Then God proceeds to lay out a plan so crystal clear it reads like a step by step blueprint for us to follow. God expects nothing less than to loose the bonds of injustice and undo the thongs of the yoke. Anywhere people are oppressed, God is working to set them free.

Wherever people are hungry, God is urging family and friends and neighbors and strangers to share any bread they have until there's enough to go around. If people don't have shelter and a warm place to lay their heads at night, God wants us to open our hearts and homes and invite them in out of the cold. The ones who don't have enough clothing to cover their bodies? You and I and the rest of God's people are charged by God to figure out how to make sure they are covered up.

God's out there being busy. Which means we have two choices. We can sit around and wait for God to appear where we are and answer our prayers. Or we can go out in the world and figure out where God is. And when we find God, we can stand by God's side and join what God is doing to make God's people whole and fed and healed and cared for...

Come to think of it, maybe it's not only that we are looking for God in the wrong places. Maybe we have to revise our concept of God while we are at it. In our world where it's easy to distance ourselves and make ourselves remote. And it's easy to ask

Google and AI to speak for us and tell us what to do. And we think we can create community and commune with God from the shelter of our own homes and our own cars and our own computer work stations.

What God wants you and me to know is that our relationship with God cannot be separated from our relationship with other people. Faith is not a private matter that's best practiced remotely and quietly. Faith is practiced in community. Particularly with the fellow human beings among us who are the most vulnerable and the most marginalized.

As we start out this program year together in the fall of 2026, we return to God's playbook and listen again to God's instruction manual laid out for us in this morning's Scripture lesson from Isaiah. Yes, spend some time in this sanctuary and in the rest of this church building doing well the ministries this church is known for. But don't get too comfortable inside these church walls. There are people struggling on the other side right here in this community.

Spend some time in the quiet spaces in your own home or in your car when you are traveling around to various commitments. Call on God's presence and solicit God's guidance. But don't get complacent. There are people hurting right outside the front doors of our houses. And there are people struggling right outside the front doors of our cars.

Head out to the places where we can trust God will be. The Northeast neighborhood of Hartford where Peter Demallie tells us often that more than ninety percent of children live in poverty. Schools in the area where Special Education classrooms are full of students and there's not enough teachers or staff members or funds to meet their needs. Prisons in this state which are understaffed while prisoners cannot access the health care they need. Nursing homes and rehabilitation centers where the staff turnover is high and there aren't enough therapists to give residents the attention and the care they need.

Or just go out to the back parking lot of this church every other Thursday and take a look at the line of people waiting for the Foodshare truck to come with surplus food to give away. The number of people standing in line for food in our very own parking lot is growing longer as we gather, with no indication that the numbers will decrease even when the weather turns cold.

Seeking God in the places where God is. If we do that as a congregation...people working together faithfully in community...then we will help God fulfill God's promise to all God's people.

"Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and God will say, 'Here I am.'" Amen.

